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Book Review by Simon Beames

When the news broke about of this book coming to fruition, my own response was two-fold: first, 'it's about time', and second, 'what took so long?'. What I never doubted was that this book needed to be published. It did. Now that the volume is out, I'll tell you about its contents and what I think are some of its particular strengths.

Before going any further with this book review, it feels necessary for me to highlight my positionality. I am a white, heterosexual man, from relatively privileged background and who has worked in outdoor adventure education for 30 years – both as a practitioner and academic. While I consider myself to be a relatively 'equalities literate' male, I assume that I bring a certain set of unconscious biases to discussions around outdoor learning and gender.

It is also important for readers to have a basic shared understanding of what is outdoor learning. Historically, many typical outdoor learning programmes have involved expeditions, adventure activities, and environmental education. Today, however, outdoor learning has become a much broader sector that encompasses such diverse areas as community gardens, refugee welcoming programmes, eco-therapy retreats, and teachers taking their curriculum outside into more authentic learning contexts. In its simplest terms, perhaps, outdoor learning can be regarded as learning about self, others, and place through the outdoors. With the above caveats and background information presented, let's get started.

Like most handbooks, this one is true to type in that it is difficult to read with only one hand! Another feature of this handbook that is unsurprising is that it lends itself well to being dipped in and out of. While I do recommend starting with chapters 1-3, which are written by the editors (in tandem and then one each), after that it probably makes sense to follow one's interest and hop amongst the 62 chapters. Navigating the content is made easier by it being chunked into categories, such as Setting the scene; Gender disparity in outdoor learning environments (OLEs); Motherhood and OLEs; Leadership, learning, transformations, and identity; Case studies of women in action; and Towards an inclusive and nourishing future for women in OLEs.

This would be a lengthy review if each chapter was commented on, so I will begin by making general overall observations on the nature of the chapters. First, this book is largely about women's stories. Second, many of these stories feature a common thread of women being consistently under-valued in a sector that was largely shaped by men, but in which half of the participants and instructors are women. Third, this critique is not accomplished through male-bashing; on the contrary, some of the strongest contributions are those which use the literature to demonstrate how social conventions through history have served to create and perpetuate highly patriarchal forms of outdoor learning programme design and leadership.

The chapters from which I took the most away were those that located their critiques of policy and practice within historical sources, social theory, and outdoor studies literature. Beyond the introductory chapters mentioned above, I was particularly educated by the historical discussion of the Norwegian suffragettes, *friluftsliv* for women, and the influence of changes in women's clothing on practice (Gurholt, Ch. 8); the innovative methodology used to capture key themes in four New Zealand women's experiences (Bell, Cosgrif, Lynch & Zink, Ch. 12); implied leadership, micro-aggressions and sexist language (Jordan, Ch. 13); and Communities of practice (Lugg, Ch. 20). I also learned about discourses that are more on the periphery of women and outdoor learning studies, such as LGBTQ Girl Scouts in the USA (Argus, Ch. 35) and Indian women's oppression through entrenched social, religious, and familial norms (Sharma-Brymer, Ch. 19).

As I made my way through the book, it became increasingly clearer to me that there is not just one woman's story that I must come to understand. Of course, to a certain degree, I know knew this already; conversations around equality, diversity, and intersectionality are part of my professional and personal interest. However, as the chapters unfolded, the complexities surrounding studying women and outdoor learning environments became stark and almost overwhelming: when elements such as sexual orientation, race, culture, media, religion, language, motherhood, and aging enter the frame, more precise language and research methodologies are needed to engage in deeper and more nuanced discussions. Examples of the latter include mother-daughter narrative inquiry on gendered outdoor experiences (Oakley, Potter & Socha, Ch. 24) and Kiewa interviewing her three grown-up children on what it was like having an adventuring mum, who was away more than other mothers (Ch. 23). While issues of race within outdoor learning environments are addressed in Rao and Robert's chapter (56), the editors are quick to point out the relative under-representation of women of colour and women from non-Western countries in the Handbook.

Although I was more drawn to the more scholarly chapters, I don't mean to denigrate the chapters that are less theoretical. I suspect that many women will find some affirmation through reading tales of sexist male behaviour and institutional misogyny, while men should be encouraged to consider how they might have been caught-up in what they assumed were 'normal' and 'acceptable' ways of acting. On this point, as a male outdoor educator, I found it particularly helpful to read concrete recommendations for practice that were offered in chapters on messages about women in adventure education journals and texts (Martin, Maney & Mitten, Ch. 18); challenges faced by women outdoor leaders (Warren, Risinger & Loeffler, Ch. 15); and Jordan's work on micro-aggressions that was mentioned above.

The latter third of the Handbook turns the spotlight towards what could be termed more enlightened outdoor learning practices. Although some of these chapters focus on girls and women, such as Whittington's work on outdoor adventure programmes for girls (Ch. 45), many cases focus on programmes for all genders, and are underpinned (at least implicitly) by eco-feminist and social justice perspectives. These cases de-emphasise adventure for adventure's sake, while privileging elements of place, culture, and the more than human, and engaging in a broader range of activities, such as loose play, eco-art, and farming. These stories point towards a broadening of the outdoor learning church, which, while not

disrespecting its roots in adventure in remote places, demonstrate how education through the outdoors can happen in diverse ways. Another dominant theme that emerges across the chapters is that while roughly half of the practitioners in outdoor learning environments are women, few are in positions of high-level leadership in non-profit organisations, schools, adventure companies, and universities.

It is undeniable that the International Handbook of Women and Outdoor Learning is a game-changer. I can imagine reading peer-reviewed papers in the field of outdoor learning published from this moment forward and asking myself to what degree the literature within this Handbook was included. Indeed, if the vast majority of our programming is gendered to some extent, then how could material from this publication not be drawn-upon at some level?

A book review is incomplete without criticism. My primary view is that I'm not convinced the book needed to be 911 pages long. There are a lot of stories and I don't think they all needed to be included. However, that may have been the point: perhaps these stories need to be heard so that it's not the same female academic voices that are being cited in essays, journal papers, and books. Although I will use the Handbook in future writing projects and in my teaching, I suspect that I'll draw predominantly on a handful of key chapters – but that this just me. People from different backgrounds will find stronger connections to parts of the tome that I didn't; that is right and good.

Having a more sophisticated understanding of how my gender makes me complicit in the kinds of enduring oppression and marginalisation that are highlighted in this book makes me want to be a better man. The stories, theories, and recommendations contained within these pages, together have the capacity to be a big step forward in making the outdoor learning sector a much richer and more inclusive one – one that better serves its participants and the communities and ecosystems they inhabit.

Simon Beames is senior lecturer in Outdoor Learning at the University of Edinburgh. He is co-author of such titles as *Learning outside the classroom*, *Adventurous learning*, and *Adventure and society*.